

## Michigan State University, East Lansing, for the Excavation of Saints' Rest

The Saints' Rest archaeology project, initiated during the summer of 2005 as part of Michigan State University's sesquicentennial anniversary, integrated archival research with the study of architectural and other material remains, and provided a unique opportunity for the greater MSU community to connect with its history. Saints' Rest was the first dormitory and one of only two buildings erected at the newly founded Agricultural College of Michigan in 1856. The site of Saints' Rest contains the remains of early life at MSU and is unique because its architectural elements are found in direct association with the cultural remains associated with its use from 1856 to 1876.

Archaeology at Saints' Rest documented the exact location and condition of the dormitory's foundation walls and explored the internal layout and nature of the building. The foundation walls, approximately two and one-half feet in width and constructed of large fieldstones and mortar, are well-preserved only inches below the modern ground surface. When fire destroyed the dormitory in the winter of 1876, while students were away on break, the three-story-high building collapsed inward compacting the structural elements, furnishings, and personal items into a two-to-three-foot-thick zone. From this zone wood heating stoves, architectural artifacts, bottles, writing implements, and toiletry items were recovered. Below this, in the basement level, internal brick walls denote the spatial layout of the building. Archival information indicates the kitchen and washroom were located in the basement; the excavation revealed a raised central hallway with cobblestone floored rooms in the west half of the building and packed earth floored workrooms in the basement as well.

The response and level of interest from students, alumni, faculty, administration, and the greater community was overwhelming. Record numbers of students sought (and continue to seek) participation in the field school and other research opportunities. Hundreds of people visited the site during the excavation and several hundred more attended open house events sponsored by the university to highlight this historic preservation research project.

The excavations at Saints' Rest involved cooperation among many different university departments, most notably the Department of Anthropology and Campus Parks and Planning, which was critical to the project moving forward. The university is to be commended for recognizing the importance of such a project not only for teaching archaeology students, or gaining knowledge through the study of the artifacts collected, but by providing the community at large with the opportunity to learn about life in the past and the role archaeology plays in preserving what we know about that past.



# Historic Preservation in Michigan

